DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 378 626 CS 508 802

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TITLE Parent Communication: Preparing for Parent-Teacher Conferences.
PUB DATE 16 Feb 95
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Guides - General (050)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; *Interpersonal Communication; Parent School Relationship; Parent Student Relationship; *Parent Teacher Conferences; *Parent Teacher Cooperation
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Behavior; *Communication Strategies

ABSTRACT

Parents should keep in mind a number of things when preparing for teacher-student conferences. First, parent-teacher conferences are important to the child's success at school. Parent-teacher conferences give parents the opportunity to deal with any misunderstandings and discuss things that relate to their child's progress in school. It is an opportunity for two-way communication. Second, parents should write down specific questions. If parents feel that their child is receiving too much homework, they should ask, what about all this extra homework? Third, parents should visit their child's classroom as part of the conference. A short tour will make parents aware of what their child is experiencing every day. They might also consider taking some time to leave their child a positive note on his or her desk. Fourth, remember that your child's success is linked to effective parent teacher communication. The child needs to know that his or her parents are working together with the teacher. Fifth, parents should avoid interrogating the teacher. They should try to avoid a rapid-fire series of questions; occasional comment from the parents does much to change the tone of the interview. Sixth, parents should try to remain calm. They should try to avoid getting angry and never make a personal attack on the teacher. (TB)

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TOPIC: PREPARING FOR PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

BY: REED MARKHAM, PH.D

DATE: FEBRUARY 16, 1995

Do you know your child's best and worst subjects?

Is your child working up to his ability?

Does your child get along with his classmates?

How much time should your child spend on their homework?

Have you noticed any changes in your child's behavior?

These are some of the questions you should consider in preparation for your parent-teacher conference. Many of the San Bernardino schools are holding parent-teacher conferences in the next few weeks. To help you prepare for the conference, keep in mind the following:

First, parent-teacher conferences are important to your child's success at school. According to John Gasson, author of GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL: "Face-to-face interviews with your child's teacher are the most important form of contact with the school. The impressions that you form of your child's teacher from reports, from what your child says or does not say, and from second hand comments, are generally only part of the complete truth." Parent- teacher conferences give you the opportunity to deal with any misunderstandings and discuss things that relate to your

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child's progress in school.

Don't forget that most of the communication between you and your school is one-way: comments on homework, report cards, open houses, and back-to-school nights. The parent-teacher conference is an opportunity for two-way communication. It's your responsibility to attend the conference and make sure your child is getting the best out of his school.

Second, write down specific questions. Jim O' Neill, principal of Kimbark Elementary School in San Bernardino says that parents "should write down specific questions about their child's work. Go to the meeting with issues in mind." For example, maybe you feel that your child is receiving too much homework. You might ask the teacher: what about all this extra homework? Discuss with the teacher any physical or emotional problems your child may be facing. Find out your child's strongest and weakest subject areas. Review any discipline problems your child may be having including attendance. Find out the teacher's homework policy. Ask the teacher about what you can do at home to help your child. And make sure the teacher understands the goals you have for your child.

Third, visit your child's classroom. Make a visit to your child's classroom a part of your visit with the teacher. O' Neill recommends that parents "look around the room and in your child's desk. This will give you a feel for what

your child is experiencing every day. If your child's desk is messy, then you might want to teach them some organizing skills. Take some time to leave your child a positive written note. A note will let your child know that you are interested in what they are doing at school and give them the feeling that mom or dad was here." Remember that regular conferences with your child's teacher is one of the most powerful motivators in helping your child to succeed in school.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

The national PTA urges parents to ask the following questions during parent-teacher conferences:

Is your child making good progress in each subject?

What can be done to encourage and challenge your child?

What kinds of tests are being given this year?

Is your child's work turned in on time? in complete form? and well done?

TOPIC: POSITIVE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

BY: REED MARKHAM, PH.D

DATE: FEBRUARY 16, 1995

Lee Canter, author of THE PARENT CONFERENCE BOOK concluded: "Parents are accustomed to hearing from the school only when their child has misbehaved or is doing poorly. It's not surprising, then, that some parents have a negative view toward teachers and the school system. You can change that attitude by providing consistent positive feedback and establishing a positive atmosphere in your classroom from the very beginning. This positive approach will also increase your probability of gaining parental support when problems do arise."

Parents can learn from Canter's advice to teachers that a positive atmosphere is important for effective parent-teacher relations. Negative experiences with past parent-teacher conferences can interfere with present ones. Some parents and teachers experience anxiety and frustration when parent teacher conference time rolls around.

The following suggestions will help you to have a positive and meaningful conference with your child's teacher:

First, remember that your child's success is linked to effective parent-teacher communication. According to Jim O' Neil!, principal of Kimbark

Elementary School in San Bernardino, "a strong parent-teacher connection is key to your child's success. It is vital that your conference be as productive and focused as possible." Your child needs to know that you and your teacher are working together. Ginger Black, author of MAKING THE GRADE says that "children who experience school difficulty normally turn first to their teachers and parents for help. If they discover that the two are unable to effectively work together to find solutions to their school problems, it can produce even more conflict within them."

Second, avoid interrogating the teacher. John Gasson, author of GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL says, "even if you take care with the way you phrase your questions, the interview can still feel like an interrogation if questions and answers follow each other monotonously like a quiz session." The best approach is to break the question and answer sequence with a comment. A spontaneous comment makes the conference more like a conversation.

Third, try to remain calm. Gasson observed: "If you feel so outraged that you cannot trust your own self-control, it is better to wait until you have calmed down before you go to see the teacher. Whatever happens, don't get so angry that you start to abuse the teacher, or make a personal attack on her professional integrity . If your emotions become aroused during the

interview, and you fear you might lose your temper, then it is best to walk out of the room."

Fourth, end the conference on a positive note. Don't forget to thank the teacher for their efforts. Black concluded: "our children's teachers are exceptional people. They most often are hardworking, well-organized individuals who have a keen interest and dedication to working with young people."

RESEARCH SUMMARY

The following suggestions will guarantee a positive parent-teacher conference:

1. Arrive at the conference at the scheduled time.
2. Be polite and friendly to the teacher.
3. Go to the conference with an open mind and a positive attitude about working together.
4. Respect the teacher as a professional who cares about helping your child to succeed.